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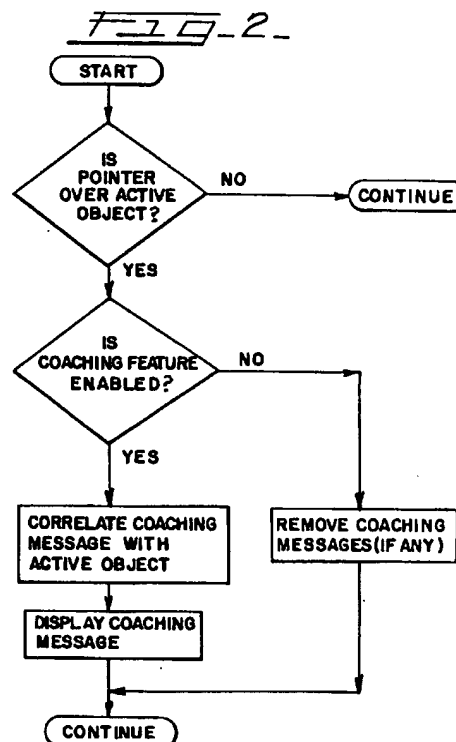
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Remarks:

This application was filed on 16 - 04 - 1996 as a
divisional application to the application mentioned
under INID code 62.

(54) Contextual help

(57) Enhancements to interface architecture for
application design that provide both a blank background
feature to mask windows of all but the current applica-
tion displayed on a data processing system screen and
a coaching feature to provide coaching messages for
active window objects selected on the display screen.



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DescriptionField of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to interface architecture for use in application design, and more specifically to enhancements or improvements in interface architecture for providing application design aids on a computer system workstation.

Background of the Invention

10 It is well known to distribute data processing applications across multiple operating systems with a variety of operating system platforms with appropriate interactive interface architecture. For instance, such interface architecture may be used to access applications from multiple operating systems. The architecture supports distributed applications on different hardware and operating system platforms while providing the building blocks for creating a graphic user inter-
 15 face and promoting open systems. The architecture accomplishes this through a server, a client, and the protocol that connects them. The server runs on the hardware in which the display and keyboard are located, providing low-level graphics, windowing, and user input functions. An example of such architecture is DECwindows™ Desktop Environment architecture. The client is an application that uses the facilities of a server. The client communicates through a protocol interface that is independent of the operating system and the network transport technology. Because the hardware and
 20 dependent graphics are performed with the server, applications are very portable across hardware and operating system platforms.

In such interactive data processing systems, as well as in other application design environments, it is desirable to be able to blank out all the windows of the application that appear on the "desktop," or display, except for the windows of the application being run. One way to accomplish this has been to iconify each window of the above applications and
 25 make the icon box window, which is non-iconifiable, as small as possible so that it is obscured by a window belonging to the application that is to be displayed. In such a system, when it is necessary to switch to another application, it is necessary to enlarge the icon box window in order to access the icons for that application and then de-iconify each of its windows. This is a very laborious process.

Another approach employs programming to create the illusion of a deep stack of windows, with only those at the very top actually visible. Responsive to operator demand, the top layer of windows turn translucent and dissolve to
 30 reveal another layer of windows behind them, and this second layer of windows may in turn be dissolved to reveal still another layer of windows, thereby making it possible to browse through complex arrays of information in simulated three-dimensional space. However, this approach allows only a single layer of windows to be displayed at any time. It is not possible to choose between the windows of the current application being run and all of the other windows.

35 Still another approach is to provide an operator-controlled function to remove all windows except for those of the current application being run. However, the removed windows do not reappear until the corresponding application is reactivated. Also, displayed icons are not removed by this approach.

It is also desirable to provide a coaching function or feature to get assistance with a particular application feature. One commonly used way to provide the coaching function has been to use the help feature. This approach is disruptive
 40 because it requires a conscious interruption to the process work flow.

Summary of the Present Invention

45 The blanking out of all the windows on the display except for the windows of the application being run is referred to as the blank background feature. The blank background function is achieved by having a screen-sized blank, undecorated window that underlies all other windows of the current application being run. The blank window is selectively removed or restored by operator command. In this way, the windows of the current application are displayed, or the windows of the current application as well as all the other windows are displayed upon operator command. Since the windows from the other applications are only masked, not removed, these windows reappear upon operator command
 50 without the need to reactivate the other applications.

The coaching feature is achieved by displaying a single line of coaching in a message window whenever the user moves a pointer in the display over an active, or "hot," object in a current window. This coaching feature enables the operator to invite automatic coaching whenever it is appropriate. The operator can turn this feature off altogether so that it is only present when needed.

Description of the Drawings

55 Figure 1 is a block diagram representing the methodology of the blank background feature according to the present invention.

Figure 2 is a block diagram representing the methodology of the coaching feature according to the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The blank background feature is initiated in the data processing system with an invocation command which is initiated from a programmed pull-down menu entry or an operator-initiated command key entry. When the invocation command is so made, a display screen-size, undecorated blank window is displayed behind the rearmost window of the current one of the applications that have run on the data processing system. This blank window obscures the windows of all the other applications that have run on the data processing system.

The blank background feature is terminated by a termination command which is initiated by a programmed pull-down menu entry or an operator-initiated command key entry, just as for the invocation command described above, as well as by a "click" entry of a "mouse" positioning the display cursor in the blank window on the display for the data processing system. When the termination command is so made, the blank window is removed, thereby revealing all the windows of the applications run on the data processing system that were masked by the blank window. A block diagram representing the methodology of the blank background feature according to the present invention as described above is shown in Figure 1.

The blank background feature is easily added to interface architecture for application design using well known programming techniques with any code of choice, as will be appreciated by those skilled in the art. For example, one suitable program for implementing the blank background feature in SuperTalk™ code for the SuperCard™ architecture supplied by Silicon Beach Software, Inc., 9770 Carroll Center Road, Suite J, San Diego, California 92126, is as follows:

Script excerpted from Project script, setting up for "Blank Background" feature:

```
open wd "Blank Screen"
set the checkMark of item "Blank background" of menu
"Preferences" to true
```

Script of "Blank Background" item in the "Preferences" menu:

```

5  on itemSelect
    global did_main_proj

    lock screen
    if the checkMark of me is true then -- item "Blank
10  background' of menu "Preferences"
        close wd "Blank Screen" of project did_main_proj
        set the checkMark of me to false
    else
        open wd "Blank Screen" of project did_main_proj
15  open wd "DW Main" of project did_main_proj
        set the checkMark of me to true
    end if
end itemSelect

20  Script of the "Blank Background" window object:

on update Window
    if the checkmark of item "Blank background" of menu
25  "Preferences" is true then
        if "Blank Screen" is in top Window() then
            close this wd
            set the checkmark of item "Blank background" of menu
            "Preferences" to false
30  end if
        else
            set the checkmark of item "Blank background" of menu
            "Preferences" to true
        end if
35  end update Window

```

This program is easily adapted to the DECwindows™ Desktop Environment architecture, as will be appreciated by those skilled in the art.

40 The coaching feature operates by determining if the display cursor is over an active, or "hot," object on the display. If it is not, any displayed coaching message is removed from the display. If the cursor or pointer is over an active object, enablement of the coaching feature is determined. The coaching feature is enabled in the same ways as for the blank background feature described above, that is, by a programmed pull-down menu entry or an operator-initiated command key entry. If the coaching feature is enabled, then one of the coaching messages corresponding to the active object
45 under the cursor is determined and displayed. A block diagram representing the methodology of the coaching feature according to the present invention as described above is shown in Figure 2.

The coaching feature is also easily added to interface architecture for application design using well known programming techniques with any code of choice, as will be appreciated by those skilled in the art. For example, one suitable program for implementing the coaching feature in SuperTalk™ code for the SuperCard™ architecture is as follows:

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Script excerpted from Project script, setting up for
"Coaching" feature:

```

5      global hush
      put "hush" into hush_ -- to inhibit coaching
      set the checkMark of menu item "Coaching" of menu
      "Help" to false

10     Script of "Coaching" item in the "Help" menu:

      on itemSelect

15         global hush
         if hush_ is "coach" then
             put "hush" into hush_
             set the checkMark of item 4 of menu "Help" to false --

20         else
             put "coach" into hush_
25             set the checkMark of item 4 of menu "Help" to true
             end if
         end itemSelect

      Script of a typical object for which "Coaching" is
30     available:

         on mouseEnter
             global hush_
             if hush_ is "coach" then -- display the Coaching
35             message
                 put "Shift/mouse to move; Option/mouse to edit;
                 Mouse to view"
             end if
         end mouseEnter

40         on mouseLeave
             global hush_
             if hush_ is "coach" then put "" -- clear out any
45             Coaching message
         end mouseLeave

```

50 This program is easily adapted to the DECwindows™ Desktop Environment architecture, as will be appreciated by those skilled in the art.

Thus, there has been described herein programming enhancements or improvements to interface architecture for application design that allow selective masking of display windows not included in a current application being run and automatic coaching message displays corresponding to active window objects selected on the display. It will be understood that various changes in the details and arrangement of the processes that have been herein described and illustrated in order to explain the nature of the invention may be made by those skilled in the art within the scope of the present invention as expressed in the appended claims.

Claims

1. A method of displaying coaching messages corresponding to objects on a display of a data processing system by changing between automatically displaying at least one of said coaching messages corresponding to an active one of said objects selected by the position of a display pointer when coaching is enabled and not displaying any of said coaching messages regardless of said display pointer position when coaching is disabled, comprising the steps of:
removing all of said coaching messages on said display if none of said active objects are selected by the position of said display pointer; and
displaying at least one of said coaching messages if an active one of said objects is selected by the position of said display pointer and coaching is enabled.
2. The method recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of determining if said display pointer position selects one of said active objects.
3. The method recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of determining if coaching is enabled.
4. The method recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of determining which of said coaching messages correspond to a selected active object.
5. The method recited in claim 3, further comprising the step of initiating a coaching enablement command.
6. The method recited in claim 5, wherein said coaching enablement command is initiated by a command key entry.
7. The method recited in claim 2 or 3, further comprising the step of determining which of said coaching messages correspond to a selected active object.
8. The method recited in claim 2, further comprising the step of determining if coaching is enabled.
9. The method recited in claim 8, further comprising the step of determining which of said coaching messages correspond to a selected active object.
10. A method of displaying coaching messages corresponding to objects on a display of a data processing system by changing between automatically displaying at least one of said coaching messages corresponding to an active one of said objects selected by the position of a display pointer when coaching is enabled and not displaying any of said coaching messages regardless of said display pointer position when coaching is disabled, comprising the steps of:
determining if said display pointer position selects one of said active objects;
determining if coaching is enabled;
removing all of said coaching messages on said display if none of said active objects are selected by the position of said display pointer or if coaching is not enabled;
determining which of said coaching messages corresponds to a selected active object; and
displaying at least one of said coaching messages corresponding to the active one of said objects selected by the position of said display pointer if coaching is enabled.

FIG-2-

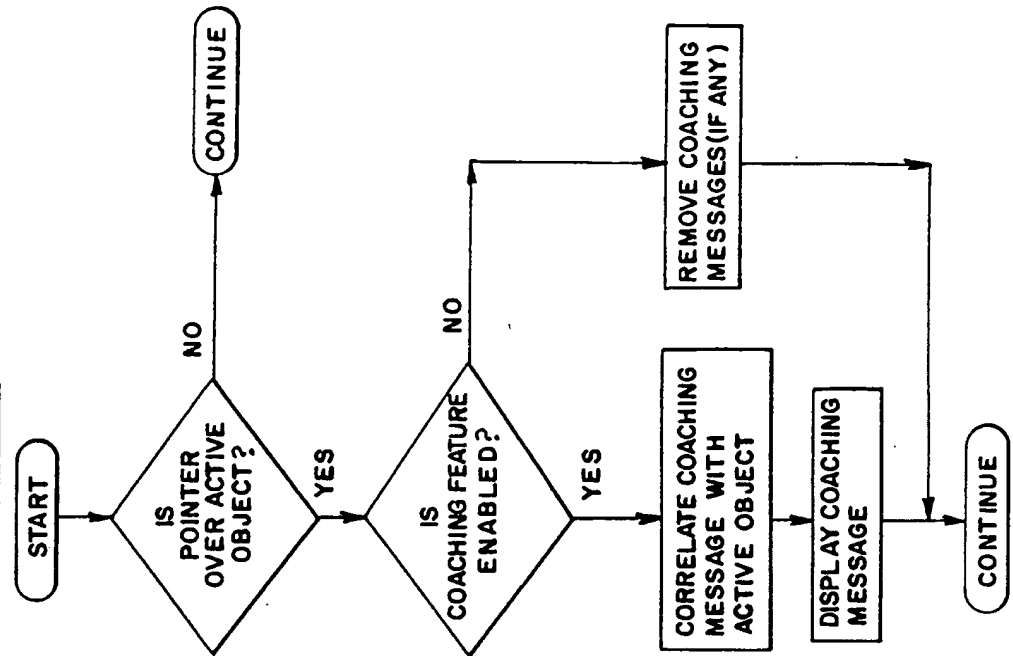
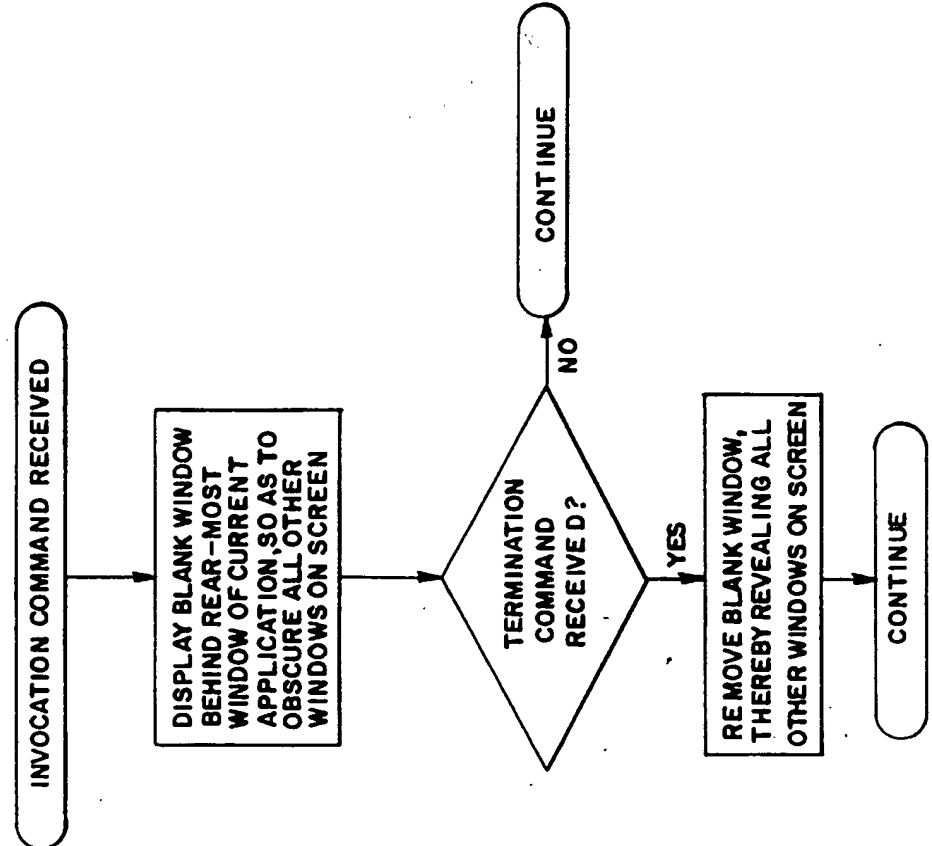


FIG-1-



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